

"A Great Year for Bubbly!"

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by Linda McCandless

GENEVA, NY: The grape harvest in New York is not expected to approach last year's record 191,000 tons. But the silver lining to the region's cool, wet summer is that this "looks like it will be a great year for premium sparkling wine." That's according to Thomas Henick-Kling, director of Cornell University's Wine Research and Extension Program at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station in Geneva, NY.

"The cool summer and fall which we have been having are ideal for ripening delicately flavored fruit with low sugar and low phenol content," says Henick-Kling. "While the very hot 1999 was not at all ideal for making great sparkling wines, 2000 is." Henick-Kling is advising wineries to consider using more of their fruit for sparkling wines this year, cautioning them "to exclude Botrytis infected fruit from sparkling base wines." The wet summer increased the incidence of bunch rot, which can leave distinctive off-flavors when allowed to develop. The down side to the 2000 grape harvest is that early frost in some vineyard areas at the end of



Suggested caption: Conditions during this year's growing and harvest season in the Finger Lakes are excellent for making sparkling wines that will be ready to taste in 2002, says Thomas Henick-Kling, director of Cornell University's Wine Research and Extension Program at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station. CREDIT: NYSAES/Cornell

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September on top of the cool, rainy summer is forcing some grape growers to harvest grapes before they are fully ripe. "Great care must be taken in sorting the immature fruit out and adjusting the fermentation conditions to increase flavor intensity," says Henick-Kling.

And there's more good news. The early frost damaged some leaves, but the recent sunny, warm days have given winemakers wonderfully flavored Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, and Gewürztraminer grapes to work with, according to Henick-Kling. "Some Pinot Noir and Merlot are already ripe. The remaining Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc are ripening beautifully. The early ripening hybrids like Cayuga White were of excellent quality." His conclusion? "After a difficult, cool season, we can look forward to intensely flavored wines with great aging potential. And, in two years, he says we will be enjoying the first of the great sparkling wines from 2000.



Suggested caption: Viticultural practices are only one of many factors in making good Finger Lakes wines, according to Thomas Henick-Kling, director of Cornell University's Wine Research and Extension Program at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station. CREDIT: NYSAES/Cornell

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Winemaking is an art and a science.

Factors influencing a year's press includes the weather during the growing season and at harvest, and the ineffable flavors contributed by the local earth, air, nutrient and water, and viticultural techniques-"terroir," as the experts say. Other important factors are the flavor maturity at harvest and winemaking techniques.

To help the over 140 New York wineries make the most of each year's crop, Henick-Kling distributes a electronic newsletters during the fall. This year, he is focusing on enhancing fruit flavor and suppressing unripe, grassy flavors.

"In 1997, we had ripe flavors, but very high acidity," said Henick Kling. "High acidity can be okay in white wines, but is very disrupting in red wines." He advises wine makers to make sure the acidity in the red wine is in balance with the flavors and the tannins.

Henick-Kling also suggests heat for under-ripe red grapes. "Heating helps extract

color and flavor and destroy unripe, grassy flavors, and can also improve unripe white wines," he says. He also says not to leave under-ripe red grapes in contact with the skin for a long time. Instead, consider pressing them off before completion of alcoholic fermentation. Henick-Kling also suggests using flavor enhancing enzymes and yeasts to enhance varietal fruit flavors.

"There still is time," says Henick-Kling, when asked to comment on this year's harvest in early October. "We might be blessed with a sunny fall and will have wonderfully flavored fruit!"

The 2000 New York grape crop is expected to be 168,000 tons, down 18 percent from last year's record crop of 191,000 tons. Approximately half of each year's tonnage is used for wine.

Henick-Kling is one of 25 Cornell University faculty and extension educators who work to insure that New York grape growers and juice and wine processors can deliver high-quality, nutritious products at reasonable costs. The associate professor of wine microbiology and fermentation technology at the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station conducts research on the influence of viticultural and vinification techniques on wine quality as well as the suitability of new grape crosses for winemaking and general wine analysis.

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